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Weather failure and brokenhearted ranchers kept whittling on the sheep flocks in the shortgrass country until the dry demon and poor spirits left few woolies to lose. On the trails north and west of Highway 67 between Mertzon and Barnhart where thousands of woolies once ranged, coyote and bobcat signs obliterate the tracks of the thin stocking of mother ewes. Empty feed sacks blowing up against the highway fences outnumber the sheep.

Only thing scarcer than sheep is an audience willing to listen to our story. No men left around to reminisce of rounding up sheep for two weeks to supply a 20-man shearing crew working from dawn to dusk. Hard put to find a listener to stay through a tale of the day a crew loaded 29 boxcar loads of lambs at Barnhart without gaining on the sheep pouring into the long "OB trap" reaching from Ozona to the railhead. Might last a round of coffee telling of Russell Hays losing 10,000 feeder lambs in the Kansas blizzard without ever having to change bankers to stay in the game.

Slim chance, but possibly a few graybeards may remember the Owens brothers from San Saba contracting so many lambs one fall that they leased an outfit on Spring Creek joining the old ranch as unsuited for fattening winter lambs as locating a skating rink in Death Valley. Joined in the hard times, the cowboy looking after the sheep asked Kelly Owens for a \$5 a month raise at Christmas. Mr. Owens answered, "Boy, not right now; but if frost doesn't kill the peaches

next spring at San Saba, I'll bring you a bushel basket full."

Sad part is that my sheep story continues. Forty-eight hours ago at this writing, I unsaddled a Mexico bred dun horse to conclude my lamb marking exercise. "Two days marking and two changes each day in the cast" was the featured subject. First day, a three-man ground crew built portable corrals while four of us took to the air on horseback to gather the sheep from the cedar bushes. The next day, the ground forces increased to six persons by adding a son and three grandkids, and promoting one Musquiz Coahuila issue to the saddlehorn squad, which had decreased to three mounted men. (Two of the previous day's riders quit to go to a team roping in Sterling City.)

The next numbers are larger, yet easier to understand. We marked a 98 percent lamb crop on the highway and 88 percent up on the Divide. (Once a hundred percent-plus was average for the shortgrass country.) The big surprise was how so many bobcats assisted by so many eagles feasting on such a small herd left that many lambs alive.

The area ratio of bobcat and eagle to ewe and lamb factored over a 30-day lambing season showed a 63 percent crop on March 10th. However, one of the biggest unknowns in predicting percentages nowadays is the effect daylight savings time has on the production of lambs and calves. Scoff if you will, but the time change throws rams off schedule in the late fall. Bulls even sound different

bellowing in the spring after the time moves forward an hour. Where the time remains static in Arizona, or across the border into Mexico, herders can count on the traditional old signs of clear moonlit nights meaning full harvest and coyote hair building up in the sagebrush as a crop failure.

Ever since daylight savings time started in the 1970s we have noticed a decrease in our crops. The effect on humans has been impossible to evaluate because the males disappear after 5 p.m. to golf courses or fishing holes to bank their extra time. And the females spend their extra hour ferrying kids to more music lessons and longer baseball games. So in the end, the total sum of hours saved actually means a loss of one hour's sleep a night or a minus 180 hours of rest for the six-month period.

I regret the loss of interest in sheep herding. Talking is the only thing I do that's constant. I sure can't mark lambs as fast as I did years ago. Also, there's not much use in telling a young cowboy that I regret riding without toe fenders on my stirrups, so I could remove them to make my saddle lighter when I throw it on my horse. Explaining such a statement to a stout young buck is especially difficult when he's using a set of aluminum stirrups to improve the speed of his dismount in a roping arena.

But it's good to eat dinner in the pasture to remember those guys of yore who were so much fun. Best, I suppose, to write a new script and hope to find an audience willing to listen ...